



From Language Learning Media to Representing Turkish Culture: Cultural Content in Turkish Language Textbooks

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Abstract

Language has a close relationship with culture, so that language learning often uses cultural content as a learning medium. Therefore this study aims to analyze the cultural content in textbooks for learning Turkish and its relation as a medium of learning between Turkish languages. This study is qualitative research with a literature study approach. The source of the data in this study was the textbook for learning Turkish, namely "Istanbul Yabancılar İçin Türkçe Ders Kitabı". Data were collected by observing the content in the book. The data obtained were then analyzed using the Miles and Huberman qualitative analysis model: data reduction, data display, and conclusion. The findings in this study lead to the conclusion that cultural content is a crucial and inseparable part of the substance of the book "Istanbul Yabancılar İçin Türkçe Ders Kitabı" as a Turkish language textbook. At this level, the cultural content has two functions at once: bridging understanding related to Turkish grammar and representing the cultural identity of the Turkish people to international students.

Keywords: *Cultural Content, Language Textbooks, Turkish Language, Turkish Culture.*

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INTRODUCTION

Türkiye has various unique cultures and is inherent in the cultural identity of its people (Paksoy & Çelik, 2019; Rahmatullah et al., 2022). Apart from that, Turkish culture also has a long history and is often associated with the history of Islamic progress (Muvid, 2022). Even in Islamic history textbooks in Indonesia, Turkish history and culture are topics of discussion that can be found (Nasution, 2017). This reality has made Türkiye a destination for continuing studies and traveling, especially for people from Muslim-majority countries, including Indonesia (Özoğlu et al., 2015).

Türkiye is one of the favorite destination countries for international students, especially from Indonesia, to continue their education at the university level. The number of international students continues to increase yearly and has reached nearly 300% in the last decade (Çetin et al., 2017; Özoğlu et al., 2015). In 2017 there were 108,706 international students in Türkiye (Yilmaz, 2018). In 2022, applicants for the Turkish scholarship program numbered 165,000 people and came from 178 countries (Turkish Scholarship, 2022). The selection of Türkiye as the destination country for continuing studies is influenced by various factors. Özoğlu et al. (2015) found that five factors influenced international students to choose

Türkiye to continue their education: quality of education, affordability, scholarship opportunities, proximity, and recommendations by others.

Despite being a favorite destination for international students, most universities in Türkiye still use Turkish as the academic language in their lectures. In their study, Nazir and Özçiçek (2022) stated that most Turkish people still use Turkish not only in daily interactions but also as an academic language for international students. This is among the reasons that English is still not very cultured to be used in Türkiye (Nazir & Özçiçek, 2022). Besides that, language is part of the cultural identity that represents the nationalism and pride of the Turkish people. Therefore, the Turkish people are trying to preserve this culture and introduce it to outsiders, one of which is through the use of Turkish as the language of lectures (Acer & Altinkamis, 2021; Aydingün & Aydingün, 2004; Nas, 2017).

The use of Turkish as an academic language leads to international students must be able to communicate using the Turkish language before starting their studies at the intended university. On the one hand, this reality is a requirement that must be met to continue studying in Türkiye. However, on the other hand, international students face problems and challenges in using Turkish in the academic space. In his study, Yılmaz (2018) found that the Turkish language used in daily conversation differs from the academic language used in lectures. In addition, some students also experience difficulties in learning Turkish due to differences in cultural backgrounds which also affect the structure and logic of the Turkish language (Kesten et al., 2010; Özoğlu et al., 2015; Rahmatullah et al., 2022).

The ability to communicate in Turkish is proven by a Turkish language proficiency certificate, namely B2 and even C1, depending on the policies of each campus (Sakarya Tomer, 2022). In order to obtain the certificate, most students attend a language preparation course for 9 to 12 months organized by a particular institution for each university, namely Türk Dili Öğretimi Uygulama ve Araştırma Merkezi (TÖMER). The Turkish language preparation course is inseparable from the use of textbooks that are a reference and one of the primary sources for students in learning Turkish.

Textbooks are essential for learning foreign languages (Hosseinzadeh et al., 2022). Therefore, learning Turkish at each university refers to the textbook material. Generally using "İstanbul Yabancılar İçin Türkçe Ders Kitabı". This book is widely used because it contains material related to Turkish grammar and is easy to understand and enriched with exercises (Aslan & Keskin, 2012a). Another advantage of the textbook "İstanbul Yabancılar İçin Türkçe Ders Kitabı" is that it is enriched with cultural content in applying specific grammatical uses. This cultural content can help international students understand the structure and logic of the Turkish language. This advantage aligns with Kidwell's view (2021) that culture is essential in language learning. On the one hand, cultural content in a language textbook will bridge the contextual understanding of grammar. Meanwhile, on the other hand, it becomes a medium to strengthen and represent the cultural identity of the people who own the language. At this level, learning foreign languages is related to improving language skills and becomes a means of cultural transmission (Baskin, 2018). Therefore Shin, Eslami, and Chen (2011) in their study stated that cultural content often dominates in foreign language learning materials.

The explanation above shows that Turkish language skills are necessary for international students who continue their studies in Türkiye. To learn Turkish, the cultural content in the textbooks plays a critical role in helping students improve their Turkish language skills. Departing from this reality, this study aims to analyze the relationship between cultural content in textbooks and learning Turkish.

Studies on cultural relations and learning foreign languages are dominated by studies on learning English. However, there are studies on learning other languages, such as Arabic, German and Turkish. The study can be mapped into two major themes. First, certain cultural representations and identities in foreign language learning. Studies with this theme found that certain cultures or cultural identities become part of learning materials and foreign language learning mediums both in textbooks and in language skills (writing, reading, listening, and speaking) (Hosseinzadeh et al., 2022; Mostafaei Alaei & Parsazadeh, 2020; Tüm & Uğuz, 2014; Uğurlu & Taş, 2020; Zhang & Su, 2021). Several studies on this theme found a hidden agenda in internalizing cultural content in foreign language learning. The agenda includes the transmission of local culture, peace missions, as well as strengthening ideology and protecting students from foreign cultures (İscan & Baskin, 2021; Kapukaya, 2020; Kidwell, 2021; Tajeddin & Teimournezhad, 2015). Second, studies related to cultural approaches in foreign language learning. These studies found that a cultural approach to learning a foreign language can stimulate curiosity and make it easier for students to learn a foreign language. This is because there is an emotional bond between students and the cultural context, the medium for learning a

foreign language (Kostikova et al., 2018; Merrouche, 2010; Rahmawati et al., 2023; Tulgar, 2018). In addition, through a cultural approach, students understand grammatical structures and the context and logic of a language (Abusyairi, 2013). Therefore, the cultural competence of foreign language teachers is a must (Sengul, 2015).

In the context of the relationship between culture and Turkish language learning, it is found that there are at least three major themes of study. First, studies related to composition, vocabulary, and cultural substance in learning Turkish (Demiral, 2013; Dürer, 2015; Tüfekçioğlu, 2021; Tüm & Uğuz, 2014). Second, is the perception of cultural content's existence in learning Turkish (Iscan et al., 2017). Third, cultural products as learning and teaching mediums (Diril, 2017; Han, 2016).

Previous studies that have been presented show that the relationship between culture and foreign language teaching, both in terms of people's perceptions as well as content and teaching media, has been carried out before. Likewise, in the context of the study of cultural relations and teaching the Turkish language. However, there still needs to be more studies related to cultural relations and Turkish language learning that explicitly analyzes the types of Turkish cultural content and grammatical packaging in the cultural content in language learning textbooks. Therefore this study aims to fill this void. The findings of this study are expected to provide significance in designing cultural content in foreign language textbooks. This is based on several studies that have found that among the causes of difficulties in learning a foreign language is the difficulty of understanding the structure and logic of language, and among the reasons is the lack of cultural content used in language learning (Drobot, 2021; Kesten et al., 2010; Kuo & Lai, 2006; Özoğlu et al., 2015; Rahmatullah et al., 2022).

RESEARCH METHODS

This study is qualitative research with a literature study approach. Therefore, the primary data source in this study is a library source, namely "İstanbul Yabancılar İçin Türkçe Ders Kitabı" (Figure 1). This book was chosen as the research data source because it is used in most universities in Türkiye as a textbook for learning Turkish. This book consists of five volumes, each containing material and grade levels, namely A1, A2, B1, B2, and C1. Each volume comprises six chapters with discussions (Aslan & Keskin, 2012a, 2012b, 2012c, 2013, 2015).

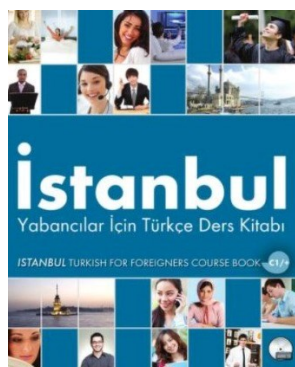


Figure 1. Cover of a Turkish language textbook

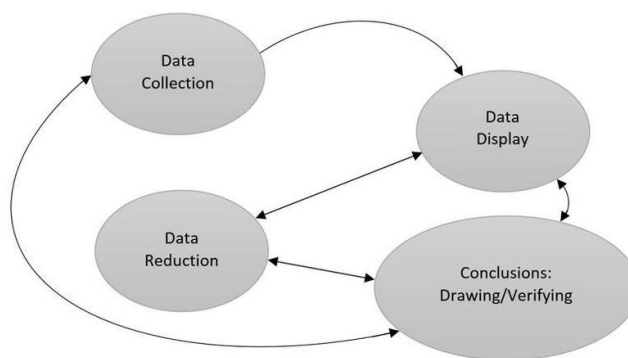


Figure 2. Data analysis process

Data was collected by content observation, namely observing the contents of the book "İstanbul Yabancılar İçin Türkçe Ders Kitabı". The data obtained were then analyzed using Miles and Huberman's interactive qualitative analysis model: data reduction, data display, and drawing conclusions (Miles & Huberman, 2014) (Figure 2).

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Cultural Content in Textbooks for Learning Turkish

The reality regarding the strong cultural identity of the Turkish people and efforts to maintain it are basically in line with the findings in this study. In the book "İstanbul Yabancılar İçin Türkçe Ders Kitabı" content related to the culture of the Turkish people can be found in every volume and every unit of

discussion. Specifically, the cultural content in the book "Istanbul Yabancılar İçin Türkçe Ders Kitabı" can be seen in the table 1.

Table 1. Cultural content in the book "Istanbul Yabancılar İçin Türkçe Ders Kitabı"

Level	Culture Type	Unite	Language Skill
A1	Turkish Architecture and Buildings	1	Writing, Listening
	Trading	2	Reading
	Social life	3	Reading
	Family	4	Reading
	Celebrations and Festivals	5	Reading
	Family and marriage	6	Reading
A2	Food	1	Reading, Speaking,
	Vacation and Travel	1	Writing
	Public figure and inventor	2	Listening, Reading
	Drink	3	Reading
	Saga	4	Writing, Reading, Speaking, Listening
	Folk entertainment	5	Reading, speaking
	Folk game	6	Reading
B1	Work	2	Writing, Listening, Speaking, Reading
	Education	4	Writing, Listening, Speaking, Reading
	Believe	5	Reading, Speaking
	Family Life and Visiting	6	Reading, Speaking
B2	Tourism and Travel	1	Reading, Speaking, Listening, Writing
	Historical building	1	Reading
	Museum	2	Reading, Speaking
	Music	3	Reading
	Fashion	4	Listening, Reading
	Tourist attraction	5	Reading, Listening, Speaking, Writing
C1	Traditional Calendar	1	Reading
	Romance	2	Reading, Listening, Speaking, Writing
	Legal System	4	Reading
	Respect	4	Reading
	Film	5	Reading, Speaking, Listening

The data in the table 1, shows that the cultural content in the book "Istanbul Yabancılar İçin Türkçe Ders Kitabı" covers almost all of the culture of the Turkish people. At this level, the cultural content indirectly helps in understanding the structure and logic of the Turkish language. The cultural content in "Istanbul Yabancılar İçin Türkçe Ders Kitabı" can be mapped into ten types of culture. Specifically, the content mapping can be seen in the figure 3.

Referring to this mapping, basically, the types of culture that are content in "Istanbul Yabancılar İçin Türkçe Ders Kitabı" are mostly related to daily life. These findings indicate that the cultural content in the book aims to improve language skills that can be used in everyday life. At this level, these contents indirectly play a role in introducing and learning appropriate vocabulary and grammar when communicating in conditions related to that culture (Ali et al., 2015). Tomak (2022), in his study, also stated that everyday cultural elements, which are teaching materials in language learning, could have an impact on improving language skills, especially grammatical, speaking and writing abilities.

This study also found that three types of cultural content predominate in "Istanbul Yabancılar İçin Türkçe Ders Kitabı": social relationship, entertainment and festivals, and art and history. This dominance looks very contrasting when compared to other types of culture. This dominance indirectly shows that the textbook is not only a learning medium but also a medium for introducing local Turkish culture to outsiders. Several studies have even found that cultural content is not only found in Turkish language learning textbooks for international students but also in foreign language learning books such as English used for Turkish students also tends to contain national cultural values adhered to by Turks (Bayrak, 2010). The dominance of Turkish cultural content in foreign language textbooks is part of an effort to strengthen

cultural identity and nationalism for Turks who learn foreign languages. Likewise, the domination of Turkish culture in textbooks, specifically for the Turkish language, indirectly becomes part of efforts to introduce Turkish culture to outsiders. According to Baskin (2018), language teaching indirectly is also cultural teaching. In line with that, the aim of dominating local culture in textbooks for learning foreign languages to strengthen identity and introduce local culture can also be found in several countries such as Chile (McKay, 2003). In Iran, local cultural content in textbooks for learning foreign languages is related to strengthening national ideology (Baleghizadeh & Motahed, 2010)

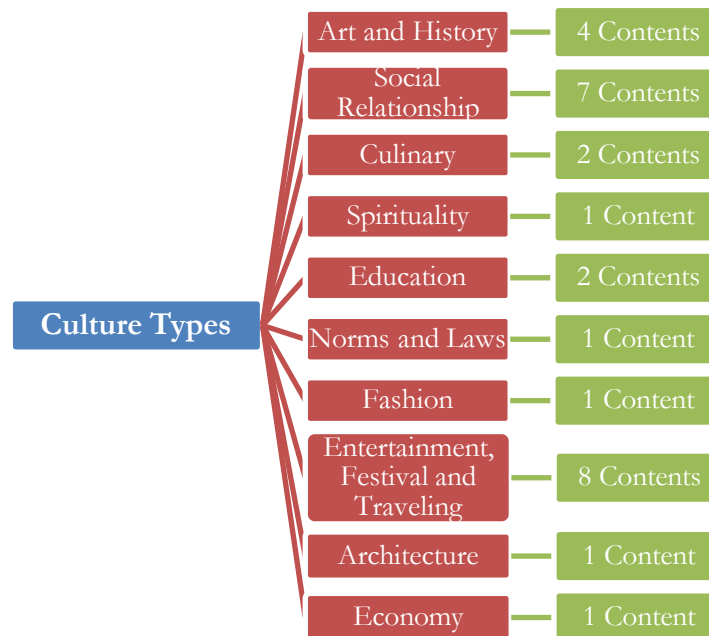


Figure 3. Types of cultural content on the book "İstanbul Yabancılar İçin Türkçe Ders Kitabı"

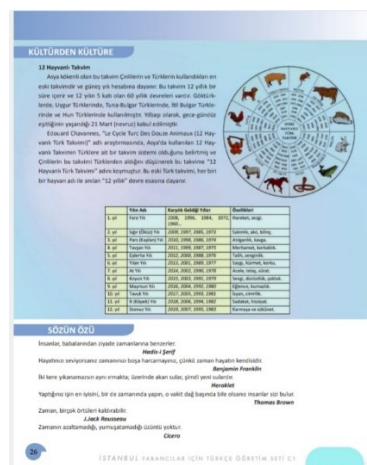


Figure 4. The specific theme of cultural content "Kültürden Kültüre"

This study also found that particular themes discuss this cultural content in each unit, namely "Kültürden Kültüre", although Turkish cultural content is also found outside of this particular discussion theme. In "Kültürden Kültüre" various Turkish cultures are packaged in an essay or text. The grammar taught is then applied to the sentences used in the text or essay. The theme "Kültürden Kültüre" (Figure 4) is generally used to hone text reading and understanding skills. A particular theme in each unit shows that cultural content is essential in learning Turkish as a medium for implementing grammar and language logic and as an introduction to Turkish culture.

The Relationship between Cultural Content and Turkish Grammar

Language is part of the cultural product of a society. Therefore learning a language indirectly also teaches the culture of a society. In other words, language learning must stay in the cultural context of a society. This is because language is a communication medium to communicate and express a culture (Afriani, 2019; Suyitno, 2017). In the context of the relationship between cultural content and learning Turkish grammar in the book "İstanbul Yabancılar İçin Türkçe Ders Kitabı", this study found that cultural content in the form of texts, essays, or conversations is used as a medium to exemplify the implementation of Turkish grammar in sentences or paragraphs.

Regarding efforts to improve language skills, namely listening, speaking, reading, and writing on cultural content, they are usually directed to read the text, after which they are asked to discuss culture-related issues guided by several questions. In addition, in other forms of text related to culture, certain words are omitted, and then students must fill in the missing words by listening to conversations related to the text. Likewise, in the context of writing skills, students are usually tasked with telling a culture they know or writing down their opinions regarding the cultural content of the book in the form of an essay.



Figure 5. Text related to culture related to listening skills

This study also found that the cultural content of the book "İstanbul Yabancılar İçin Türkçe Ders Kitabı" is correlated with the level of proficiency in Turkish. The higher the level of Turkish language taught in the textbook, the more diverse the language skills related to the cultural content will be. However, the lower the level of Turkish language taught in the textbook, the fewer language skills related to the cultural content (Figure 5). This finding refers to table 1 where at level A1, language skills related to cultural content are still dominated by one skill, namely reading. However, from level A2 to C1, almost every cultural content in the textbook is mainly related to at least two or even four language skills at once, namely listening, reading, speaking, and writing. This is because the A1 level is the level of introduction and basic knowledge of the Turkish language. In addition, at level A1, vocabulary mastery is still minimal, so it is not yet possible to connect cultural content with various skills.

Meanwhile, students from B1 to C1 levels are considered to know the basics of the Turkish language, and their vocabulary mastery is also increasing so that the grammar taught at these levels is more numerous and complicated. At this level, it is natural that almost every textbook's cultural content relates to at least two Turkish language skills. This finding is basically in line with the findings of several previous studies that the higher the level of mastery of a foreign language, the more complicated the grammar and vocabulary used in the text or material being studied (Giawa & Panjaitan, 2021; Kilic, 2019; Manihuruk, 2020; Yuliawati, 2018).

CONCLUSION

This study is limited to examining only cultural content in the textbook "Istanbul Yabancılar İçin Türkçe Ders Kitabı" and analyzing its relations in teaching Turkish. Referring to the data that has been analyzed, this study obtained four findings. First, cultural content can be found at almost every level and unit of the book "Istanbul Yabancılar İçin Türkçe Ders Kitabı" and represents a variety of cultures ranging from classical to modern culture. There is even a particular theme for cultural content in the book, namely "Kültürden Kültüre." Another finding from this study is that the cultural content in the book "Istanbul Yabancılar İçin Türkçe Ders Kitabı" does not only serve as a medium and bridges discussions regarding Turkish grammar, but also as a medium for branding, representation, and introducing Turkish culture to outsiders. Second, in quantity, three types of culture dominate in the book "Istanbul Yabancılar İçin Türkçe Ders Kitabı": social relations, entertainment and festivals, and art and history. Third, cultural content is related to the level of language ability and language skills. The higher the level of Turkish language proficiency, the more diverse the skills associated with the content will be. Fourth, the cultural content in the book "Istanbul Yabancılar İçin Türkçe Ders Kitabı" is dominated by culture related to daily routines. At this level, this domination has an impact on getting used to and introducing the use of appropriate vocabulary and grammar to communicate in these circumstances. Based on these findings, it can be concluded that cultural content is an essential and inseparable part of the substance of the book "Istanbul Yabancılar İçin Türkçe Ders Kitabı" as a Turkish language textbook. The cultural contents in the book have a close relationship in bridging the learning of Turkish in terms of grammar, language skills, and language logic. At the same time, the cultural content also plays a role in introducing the culture and local wisdom of the Turkish people to outsiders. At this level, the cultural content has two functions: bridging understanding related to Turkish grammar and representing the cultural identity of the Turkish people to international students.

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